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Response Paper, *The House of Mirth*

Lily Bart revolves her whole life around money. She is not of the highest social class; therefore she has to worry about things that the highest class need not worry about, such as money and poverty. Lily’s definition of freedom is “freedom from worries” but as we see throughout the novel, she does not feel free because she is constantly worrying about her debt (60). After asking for stock advice from Trenor, she is very naïve to think that he will not want something in return. Eventually she will have to pay Trenor back and that will add on to her worries. Despite Miss Bart’s definition of freedom, I feel like she is starting to gain a feeling of freedom when she starts opening herself up to Selden.

Lily Bart has the potential to survive in this society, but she has made many careless mistakes. She should have realized that Selden was the perfect man for her since day one. In my opinion, I would compare the way Lily treats Selden to a certain modern day relationship. She likes him enough to keep him on the line like a fish, but she does not like him well enough to reel him in and marry him. This is based solely on the fact that Selden is of the working class and does not have any family money. There are plenty of modern day relationships that are quite similar to this. For instance, take the ‘pacts’ that people make all the time in movies, “If we don't find a spouse by the time we are 40 years old then we will get married”. That is exactly what Selden and Miss Bart’s relationship reminds me of. Miss Bart is keeping Selden hanging on for future use if she does not find anyone better than Selden. Now, she does actually end up developing strong feelings for Selden in chapters 5-15, but if she would not have cared about money and stopped playing games with Selden then they would have realized their true feelings sooner and he would not have left “for Havana and the West Indies” because of a misunderstanding (158).

Lily is very materialistic and immature before she finds out what she truly wants. She plays games and manipulates people when it is not necessary. In chapter twelve, when Selden and Lily get to talking about themselves as a couple, that is where I start to see her growing up and maturing. She is listening to her heart and realizing that money is not everything that she needs in a husband, saying “love me, love me” to Selden one evening (122). She is not falling in love with him solely because of his money. Lily is changing her definition of freedom. She did say that freedom to her is “freedom of worries” (60). In her perspective her worries are all money and her debts. I feel like she is becoming freer and more herself around Selden since he makes her forget all about her worries. She can be herself around him. Selden even finds that when Lily is herself that is the “most interesting thing about her” (60). Miss Bart’s definition of freedom is disproven because money is still the majority of her worries, but Selden is what makes Lily forget all about her worries; therefore letting Lily feel free.